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C26zmclc Conference UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT 1 SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK 2 3 HENRY MCLEAN and EDWIN RIVERA, 4 Plaintiffs, 5 10 CV 3950 (DLC) V. 09 CV 9325 (DLC) 6 GARAGE MANAGEMENT CORP., et 7 al., 8 Defendants. 9 10 February 6, 2012 2:00 p.m. 11 Before: 12 HON. DENISE L. COTE, 13 District Judge 14 APPEARANCES 15 KAHN OPTON LLP 16 Attorneys for Plaintiff Class BY: STEPHEN H. KAHN 17 LAW OFFICE OF JUSTIN A. ZELLER Attorneys for Plaintiff Ramirez 18 BY: BRANDON D. SHERR 19 LITTLER MENDELSON 20 Attorneys for Defendants BY: MICHAEL WEBER ELIAS KAHN 21 22 23 24 25

1 THE COURT: We'll take appearances. We have two cases The first one is Mclean 10 Civ. 3950, the second is 2 here. 3 Ramirez 09 Civ. 9325. 4 Let's take appearances first in Mclean for the 5 plaintiffs. 6 MR. KAHN: Stephen H. Kahn, the law firm of Kahn Opton 7 LLP. THE COURT: And you are assisted by? 8 9 MR. KAHN: No. 10 THE COURT: No. You're in this case, the plaintiffs? 11 MR. SHERR: Yes, ma'am, Brandon Sherr from the Law 12 Office of Justin A. Zeller for the Ramirez plaintiff. 13 THE COURT: Okay, thank you. And for Garage Management, the defendant in both 14 15 cases? 16 MR. WEBER: Michael Weber and Elias Kahn, Littler 17 Mendelson. Also --18 MS. HERZBERG: I'm not stating an appearance. I'm here 19 on behalf of Garage Management instead of the client, Aliza 20 Herzberg. 21 THE COURT: Okay, Aliza? 22 MS. HERZBERG: A-l-i-z-a, Herzberg, H-e-r-z-b-e-r-g. 23 THE COURT: And also Mr. Weber. 24 MR. WEBER: Yes, your Honor, Michael Weber and Elias

Kahn, counsel for the defendants in both cases. My colleague,

Elias Kahn.

THE COURT: Oh, I'm sorry. Thank you. Much appreciated.

So I have a series of letters.

I have a January 30th letter from the plaintiffs in the McLean case, a February 2nd letter from defense counsel, and February 3rd submissions from Mr. Kahn and from defense counsel.

There are two sets of issues at least that we need to address today, and one is the issue about the opt outs, and a second is the issue of the time records or time cards.

We are facing a pretrial order date of February 17th in this case. These cases are on the March 12th trial ready calendar.

I issued an opinion in August of last year, dealing with some of the defenses the defendants had sought to interpose with respect to overtime pay claims. And a scheduling order in October set the schedule, largely set the schedule under which we're now operating.

The question of the opt outs is a very significant one. The notice to the class was mailed on or about November 23rd. And I understand that there are roughly 17 opt outs so far, that at least the Court has record of. I don't know precisely how large the class is, but there were 68 garages at the time of the opinion that was issued last year.

And the dates of the exclusion requests that we have records of, run from early December, December 11th up until January 19th. Only a handful were received before by this Court before January 24th.

Almost of the exclusion requests that we have received are dated -- well, were received by the Court between

January 24th and January 27th -- at least that's when it was entered in the Court's records. And the dates of those exclusion requests on the documents, themselves, run principally since January 18th, though there are a handful from an earlier period of time.

When I issued the order in this case that dealt with some of the scheduling issues and also with -- well, let me start again.

When I issued my October 21st order, which dealt with some of the findings for certification of a class, I ordered, among other things, that defense counsel may not communicate or cause his clients to communicate with class members regarding this litigation and the decision to opt out of the class action, unless prior consent is obtained from the Court or class counsel.

And in a recent endorsement of January 17th, I permitted the defendants to speak with garage managers about this litigation, but only when the garage manager initiated the conversation, and only to provide the garage manager with

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another copy of the notice and its attached exclusion request, or to direct the garage manager to plaintiffs' counsel.

It would appear that the letter of the order was not followed, nor was the spirit complied with. I have a declaration from a Mike Isaac, I-s-a-a-c, submitted with a February 2nd letter from defense counsel, which is less than clear about precisely who did what, but it looks as if Mr. Isaac was requested to and did contact and initiate discussions with garage managers about this litigation.

I have an application from plaintiffs' counsel to address 13 requests -- that's plaintiffs' counsel number -essentially, all requests to opt out of the class action generated on January 17th or thereafter.

And based on the history here and the pattern of the submission of these opt out requests at the very end of the class period, which is to close or did close January 27th, I am going to make inquiry and, if necessary, conduct a hearing. would want Mr. Isaac, and anyone else from Garage Management Corporation, who had contact with any individual opting out plaintiff to testify. Depending on what I hear at that hearing, I will take testimony from each of the plaintiffs who opted out on January 17th or thereafter. But I think for our purposes, we should assume that those opt out requests may be stricken.

MR. WEBER: Can I ask for a clarification, your Honor?

THE COURT: Yes.

MR. WEBER: The declaration of Mike Isaac, to me, complies with your Court's ruling, as far as responding to inquiries. So I understand you may want a hearing to get further testimony.

When you say "may be stricken," under what circumstances would the Court consider striking the opt outs?

THE COURT: Okay. Well, let's look at Mr. Isaac's declaration. I mean, the ultimate issue here is whether intimidation and fears of retaliation have driven an individual to opt out of the class, when that individual would not otherwise have chosen to do so. So those are the rights that are at stake here.

Looking at Mr. Isaac's declaration, he says "That garage managers contacted Garage Management Corporation to notify us," et cetera.

I don't know which garage managers contacted who at Garage Management Corporation. I don't know if Mr. Isaac is referring to himself, though he's speaking in the third person. I don't know who he refers to, who he is referring to as "us".

Then later on in paragraph four, Mr. Isaac says, "I was asked to deliver the forms to the manager." It doesn't identify who made that request of him. Later in that same paragraph, he says, "Once it got out that several managers had not received the court-issued paperwork, I delivered the papers

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to these managers." Again, it's unclear because the specifics are not stated, but the phrasing suggests that Mr. Isaac initiated conversations with various garage managers.

So we need to flesh out the facts. We need to figure out whether or not orders were or were not obeyed, and we need to figure out ultimately whether individual garage managers who opted out did so because of pressure or fear.

MR. WEBER: Thank you for that clarification, your Honor.

THE COURT: So I'm happy to hold the hearing this week. I could do it tomorrow. I'll let counsel, at the conclusion of this hearing, compare their schedules and we'll set a hearing date. And we'll start with Mr. Isaac and any other employee of Garage Management Corporation who had a conversation with a garage manager who opted out.

MR. KAHN: Your Honor, if I may inquire?

THE COURT: Yes, Mr. Kahn.

MR. KAHN: Thank you. Will the Court conduct the inquiry or is counsel invited to question Mr. Isaacs and any other witnesses?

THE COURT: Counsel will start the inquiry.

MR. KAHN: Will examine.

THE COURT: I'll feel free to ask questions.

MR. KAHN: Thank you, Judge.

THE COURT: Okay. There was a request in these

letters to extend the opt out period. That's denied.

I will want from Mr. Kahn an affidavit about mailing, to certify that the mailings were sent on or about November 23rd to the addresses that were provided by the defendants.

Do you have any problems with that, Mr. Kahn?

MR. KAHN: None whatsoever, Judge.

THE COURT: When can you get that in?

MR. KAHN: I'll have that when we appear in court this week.

THE COURT: Okay, good.

Let's turn to the time card issue. This issue has enormous significance for the calculation of damages, at least it would appear to have that impact from the defendants' submission. It's unclear to me, based on the parties' letters, when the defendants first notified plaintiffs' counsel that they were taking the position that the payroll records were not reliable.

MR. KAHN: Your Honor --

THE COURT: And that the time cards reflected different hours worked each week than is reflected in the payroll records.

MR. KAHN: Your Honor, I know that date. It was in a letter addressed to Judge Gornstein that I was copied on, dated December 7, and delivered to me by e-mail on December 7. I

believe in the afternoon, although I'm not sure of that.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. KAHN: Pearl Harbor Day, for sure.

THE COURT: So, Mr. Weber, why don't you address this situation, to the extent you have something you'd like to say.

MR. WEBER: Thank you, your Honor.

As your Honor knows, we, the defendants, took the position that garage managers were exempt; that they worked -- since they were exempt, actual hours didn't matter. Whether they worked 20 hours or 100 hours, they're exempt managers; doesn't matter from an overtime point of view.

When your Honor ruled contrary to that, that they were non-exempt, we had discussions with Mr. Kahn and we offered for him to come and see the actual time records at GMC -- and they're quite extensive -- to show that times varied when they and -- when they started and when they ended. Those are the actual hours worked. We never obviously thought that was relevant, because they're exempt; didn't matter what their hours were.

Now, as your Honor may recall, the treatment of the managers is complex because they're covered by a collective bargaining agreement, and there's certain ramifications as to benefits, et cetera. So they track their hours, even though it didn't matter, from their perspective, until your Honor ruled against them, whether they worked 40, 50 or 60.

You may recall they got paid typically 50 or 60 hours. They had sort of a salary, then they got this additional compensation, EC, on a monthly basis which, arguably, was for either overtime or a bonus, depending on how you looked at it. Your Honor didn't feel it was for overtime or a bonus, and ruled against us in that regard.

We never focused on, nor did we think it was relevant, as to the actual hours worked, because they were exempt. Your Honor ruled against us. We offered to Mr. Kahn to come see the actual records. And we've since produced some, about a third of the managers' actual time records as a sampling to show when they actually worked.

That's how we get to this issue today. So when we had payroll that showed 50 and 55 hours, that was because they were, again, exempt and it didn't matter. They actually worked different hours, which was what we're suggesting to Mr. Kahn, which we offered him to look at our actual records.

THE COURT: Where did the hours come from that were in the payroll records?

MR. WEBER: They've been historic. When you are a manager, you got --

MR. KAHN: That's not the case.

THE COURT: Excuse me. Don't interrupt.

MR. KAHN: I'm so sorry. I apologize.

MR. WEBER: They had, simply had all these hours that

they put down for each garage for each manager, 50 or 55, 1 2 typically. THE COURT: But it wasn't a uniform number. 3 4 MR. WEBER: Correct, your Honor. 5 THE COURT: So where did the numbers come from? 6 MR. WEBER: When you say the "numbers," the 50 and the 7 55? THE COURT: From the payroll records. There were 8 9 differences in the numbers. 10 MR. WEBER: The actual hours. 11 THE COURT: No. On the payroll records. There wasn't 12 just a set number recorded. It changed. 13 MR. WEBER: Yes. Some days they weren't -- they 14 didn't work, for example, for a week, there weren't any hours, 15 correct. Right. They fluctuated. 16 THE COURT: 17 MR. WEBER: Correct. THE COURT: For an individual. 18 19 MR. WEBER: Correct. 20 THE COURT: Okay. So what did those fluctuations 21 reflect? 22 MR. WEBER: They were out for vacation, I think sick, 23 personal days. I believe that's what they reflected. 24 THE COURT: So you're saying their time was taken

account of in the payroll records to some extent, but not

completely.

MR. WEBER: I'm not sure if it was -- when they didn't work a week or a day, if it was for the benefit issued under the collective bargaining or not, I'm not exactly sure why it was reflected that way. I know there, clearly there are weeks when, or days when they weren't paid, so to speak, for either vacation or sick or personal days, is my understanding.

THE COURT: Okay.

When the issues with respect to the exemptions were litigated before me, and certain documents were submitted in connection with the summary judgment motion and certain positions were taken by the parties, and it's my recollection that at that time and in your, or in your motion papers the defendants took the position that the payroll records reflected the hours worked, including the overtime hours.

MR. WEBER: Your Honor, I think we -- correct me, I may be mistaken, I think we argued that they worked 50 or 55 for overtime purposes, plus the extra compensation to show that they were exempt, not that those were the actual hours. I don't think anybody -- I don't think we said those are the actual hours worked. I could be wrong. I have to look at our submission. I'm quite sure we --

THE COURT: Okay. I will want counsel to look at your summary judgment papers and every other submission to the Court before December 7th that reflects the position the defendants

have taken on this. I know there was no suggestion that the payroll records weren't reliable. as I noted in my opinion, and this was what I understood the parties' position to be; that is, both the defendants and the plaintiffs, that the payroll records reflected the variations in wages based on the number of hours worked during a pay period, and that the defendants do not suggest that these records are inaccurate.

MR. WEBER: I think we submitted documents that showed the garage managers were scheduled for those hours, the 50 or the 55, typically.

THE COURT: Well, it will be interesting to look at your motion papers, but I don't think that's how it was presented.

And, in fact, I think what was presented was the picture that people used time cards, and as a result people punched in and punched out of work, and that the payroll records reflected the actual hours worked.

There was a huge discussion, as I remember, whether or not the deposits were made after hours or during the work day and how close the depository was; so how much extra time it would have taken to walk over and make the deposit at the, let me say district office or whatever.

MR. WEBER: Correct.

THE COURT: And so the whole motion practice was litigated in the context as if the payroll records included

every hour worked, not more, not less, but because of a system that was in place. And, as a result, my rulings applied what the parties were in, as I understood it at that time, in an undisputed way describing as the system that was in place to record the actual hours worked by the employees, and everybody made arguments based upon that record.

Now, the ruling that I issued in August, in some ways, wasn't a surprise, since similar issues had been litigated in the past for a different category of employees, as I remember from the opinion.

MR. WEBER: I'm not sure I understand that part, your Honor.

THE COURT: Let me see if I can find what I'm referring to. It's on page 16 of my opinion where I referred to a Department of Labor investigation with respect to GMC's practices in paying its parking attendants, where GMC had used a bonus system there that was similar to the EC bonuses that are at issue here. So that's what I was referring to.

But, in any event, it seems to me, and I'll give everybody a chance to pull together the briefing and the discovery exchanges or whatever, prior to December 7th that would have indicated that the defendants were or were not taking a position that the payroll records reflected the hours that the garage managers worked.

The implication of this I think is not small. Because

we have, as set forth in the scheduling order from October, a March trial date, March 12th, and the pretrial order is due this month, February 17th, just days from now. So it raises, in my mind, whether it is fair to alert plaintiffs on December 7th for the first time that the defendants are no longer taking the position that the payroll records are accurate, and that instead what's going to be necessary is for the parties to engage in extremely burdensome and detailed examination of the time cards.

Now, it sounds like the defendants have been doing this for some time, and it is expensive and burdensome.

MR. WEBER: We hope to get summaries, and we have given summaries to Mr. Kahn on some of them.

MR. KAHN: No, that's not correct, sir.

MR. WEBER: On the 24 we gave you?

MR. KAHN: No. Your Honor, may I?

THE COURT: So the plaintiffs would have a right to investigate the time cards themselves and do your own analysis and testing. Time cards may or may not be accurate, of course. I don't know if they're complete, and it raises a whole other set of issues.

So this issue has the potential for transforming the nature of this litigation, make it far more expensive and burdensome for all at the end of the discovery period and the end of the period, the period during which you would have

expected people to be focusing on preparing of the pretrial order and getting ready for trial.

MR. WEBER: We had offered Mr. Kahn that opportunity to come in and look at the records sometime ago.

THE COURT: Well, without indicating to him that it was because you didn't think the payroll records were reliable or accurate, no one would expect that you need to spend the time and resources to look at the underlying time cards. You would use, in most systems, you know, the summary documents which would be the weekly payroll records as opposed to daily punch cards.

MR. WEBER: You're using language, your Honor, that I take exception to. Mr. Kahn was very well aware of what defendants' position was. When your Honor ruled against us, there was discussion with my colleague and Mr. Kahn about coming in to see the actual punch — the actual time records because that's what our position is. If we're going to be non-exempt treated, if the manager is going to be non-exempt, you have to look at the actual hours.

As your Honor noted, and it was -- it should have been I think apparent, when there was an issue of when individuals punched in and out of to drop off the cash receipts, that that was what we looked at. That's -- not they're going to be non-exempt. You have to look at when they worked.

I don't think it's as big a -- maybe it is -- but

we're certainly working on summaries so Mr. Kahn can look at them and see them, that these are the actual hours worked. I don't think it's a surprise, and we certainly said come in and look at them some time ago, after your Honor ruled.

THE COURT: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Kahn.

MR. KAHN: Yes, just a very few things, your Honor.

Mr. Weber has, I believe, told the Court in his
February 3rd letter that there are approximately 24,000 time
cards. I have received a stack of time cards that's about
18 inches high. I've not counted it, but it's far less than
24,000 people.

Even as recently as December 7, when Mr. Weber first raised this defense, he had at that time said that they had sampled time cards only of about a dozen employees. So even as recently as December 7, Mr. Weber's client hadn't done this very work he's talking about. This was clearly a new idea.

Certainly, as the Court noted, I was not at all motivated to look at the time cards when there had been a representation that the payroll records were accurate all along.

I've also not received any summary or any indication of what these, even this 18-inch stack of time cards means.

All I got was a cover letter from Mr. Weber, I believe on January the 18th, although I'm not certain of the date, stating

here are some time cards from some employees, in substance.

And they weren't the complete time cards of any employee.

There was no indication of how these time cards fit into this new theory. There was never an offer to look at time cards for this new theory until December 7. Discovery closed I believe last March, certainly many months before the summary judgment motions.

THE COURT: Well, that was with respect to, if I remember correctly, the named plaintiffs.

MR. KAHN: I think all fact discovery closed in March, your Honor, I believe.

THE COURT: Okay.

MR. KAHN: Thank you, Judge. And I'm sorry for my heat, if it doesn't shed light.

THE COURT: Okay. So why don't we work on a schedule where sometime this week counsel can pull together the prior exchanges, either in response to discovery requests or in connection with the motion practice in which there were representations about the payroll records and the pay stubs, which would or would not cause plaintiffs to understand that these records that the defendants were taking the position that these records reflected the actual hours worked. And we'll take a pause at the end of this conference for counsel to talk with each other about when this week that would be convenient for them to do.

Now, those are the two issues I have.

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Let me just make sure that counsel don't have something else. Mr. Kahn?

MR. KAHN: Not at this time, your Honor. Mr. Weber and I are discussing the admissibility of one piece of evidence, but we haven't talked about that within the last several weeks. So I don't know that it would be fair to him or to the Court to bring that to your attention. Hopefully we'll resolve it, but if not -- but that's a smaller issue, your Honor.

> THE COURT: Okay.

I would, your Honor, if I might just talk MR. KAHN: about the schedule for a moment. With this press of many new things, your Honor, I don't know about Mr. Weber's firm, but certainly I'm a little bit further behind where I thought I would be with a preparation of the pretrial materials.

I'm wondering if the Court does not -- is not inclined to put off the trial date -- and I would not object to that being pushed back a short while, if the Court wanted to -- I would hope that the Court might not be inconvenienced if we at least put back the pretrial submission date.

So I guess I would ask for both, but be very happy to get one, Judge.

Your Honor, in that regard, I have a trial MR. WEBER: before Judge Baer on March 12th, scheduled for March 12th as

So I would join with Mr. Kahn in requesting an extension 1 well. of both the pretrial and the trial date. 2 3 MR. KAHN: And I might just add one further thing, 4 your Honor. My adversaries have always been very courteous to 5 me. Elias, his family's expecting their first kid on about 6 March 1. He's been the main attorney, besides Mr. Weber, 7 involved in this. THE COURT: Congratulations. 8 9 MR. ELIAS KAHN: Thank you. 10 MR. KAHN: I certainly wouldn't want to be 11 responsible for interfering. 12 MR. WEBER: We appreciate that, Mr. Kahn. And it 13 would maybe facilitate a number of issues, your Honor, if we 14 could adjourn the trial date for a month. 15 MR. KAHN: Having said that, of course, we'll be prepared on the 12th if your Honor wants. 16 17 THE COURT: Okay. Any other issue, Mr. Weber? 18 MR. WEBER: No, your Honor. 19 THE COURT: Okay, so we're going to go off the record 20 and just talk about scheduling for a moment. 21 (Off-the-record discussion) 22 THE COURT: Back on the record. 23 Counsel and I have just discussed scheduling issues,

and we're going to have a hearing on February 14th at 2:00

p.m., at which Garage Management employees who spoke with

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garage managers about the opt out issue or provided them documentation with respect to the opt out issue will be testifying. It may be Mr. Isaac alone, it may be more than Mr. Isaac.

And with respect to the parties' joint request that the pretrial order and trial dates be adjourned, we've agreed that the pretrial order documents will be due March 19th, and the matters will be placed on the trial ready calendar for April 2nd.

At our hearing next week we're going to discuss whether this trial proceeds as a jury or non-jury matter. We're going to talk about whether the McLean and Ramirez cases proceed together on the same date. That may be difficult if one is jury and one is non-jury. Counsel are going to discuss with each other their respective positions with respect to whether the trial should proceed as a jury or non-jury trial.

And then this Friday counsel will provide to the Court, with a cover letter no longer than two pages, those writings they exchanged before December 7th in which the defendants did or did not lead plaintiffs to understand that it was the defendants' position that the payroll records and pay stubs accurately reflected the hours worked by garage managers.

Thank you, counsel.

MR. WEBER: Thank you very much, your Honor.

MR. KAHN: Judge, thank you so much.